PITTA

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YADGARPALLY: A NEW BIRD HABITAT
Report: Yadgarpally Village, Rangareddy Dt, Dec 2020-July 2021

Text & Photos: Sita Susarla

West Yadgarpally

A beautiful landscape with typical Deccan rock formations, lush green paddy fields, an expanse of blue water, and an abode for birds, best describes the sleepy village of Yadgarpally. Located to the north-east of Hyderabad, about 30km from Punjagutta in Hyderabad, Yadgarpally is the border village between Rangareddy and Nalgonda districts. In quest of exploring new areas of birds we made several short trips to the outskirts of Hyderabad city, and chanced upon Yadgarpally village that lay on the Shamirpet-Keesara road. On either side of this road were paddy fields.

At a small wetland patch among the fields, there were many flocks of birds. As we approached this patch, a couple of wary villagers stopped us to enquire about the purpose of our visit. When we told them that we had come to look for birds, they became very friendly. One of them suggested that we visit the eastern side of the village where there happened to be a big lake and a nature preserve. We thanked them for the information and went around listing the birds we spotted.

This being the month of December we sighted flocks of Wood Sandpipers, some Common Sandpipers, Little Ringed Plovers, half a dozen Asian Openbills, a large number of Black-headed and Red-naped Ibis, and several White-browed Wagtails.

Red-necked Falcon with kill

There was also a scrubland on one side inhabited mostly by smaller birds like Bay-backed Shrike, Lesser Whitethroat, some Indian Silverbills, and a few ground birds like Jungle Bush Quails and Grey Francolins. The highlight of the day however was a Red-necked Falcon that was hunting Ashy Woodswallows and Asian Palm Swifts!

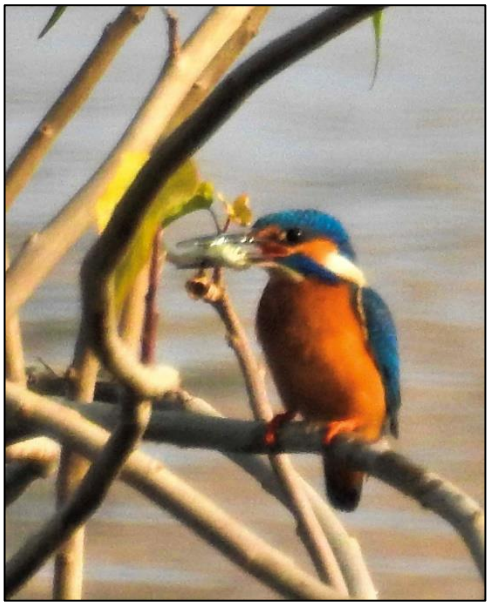
Thoroughly satisfied with the outing, and with the prospect of visiting another birding ground soon, we returned home. On the map we tried to locate the lake referred to by the villagers and found The Great Ambience Lake near Gandi Maisamma Temple, and a nature preserve called Under The Moon Nature Preserve (or UTM), both of them in East Yadgarpally.

The Great Ambience Lake, East Yadgarpally

On the subsequent weekends we visited East Yadgarpally, which also had many paddy fields on either side of the approach road to the lake. On our very first visit we had the good fortune of adding a lifer to our list of birds. This was the Black-headed Bunting, spotted among a mixed flock of Baya Weavers, Scaly-breasted Munias and assorted Starlings.

Black-headed Bunting

The drive from the field to the lake was a topsy-turvy stretch of one and a half kilometres. The lake view was really amazing. There were Spot-billed Ducks, Lesser Whistling-ducks, a pair of Painted Storks, and many Great Cormorants, White-browed Wagtails, River Terns, Common and Pied Kingfishers.



Common Kingfisher

On the clump of trees nearby were a Blue-faced Malkoha, Common Iora, Black-winged Kite, Indian Roller and many other birds listed below.

Booted Eagle

Common Kestrel

Blue Rock Thrush female

In the middle of January, it was a raptor show with various raptors like Oriental Honey Buzzard, Booted Eagle, Common Kestrel, Black Kite and a pair of Shikras. The Jerdon's Bushlark was a regular sight at both East and West Yadgarpally, and it always greeted us with full-throated calls. However, for some reason, a part of the lakeside was fenced when we visited in March and also the number of people visiting the lake had increased. I hope the lake surroundings will remain intact so that the habitat is not disturbed.

The full list of birds seen during the various visits is given below:

Birds seen at West Yadgarpally							
Sl No	**Common Name**	**Scientific Name**	**Month**	**Sl No**	**Common Name**	**Scientific Name**	**Month**
1	Wood Sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*	Dec 2020	29	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*	Dec 2020
2	Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*	Dec 2020	30	Dusky Crag Martin	*Ptyonoprogne concolor*	Dec 2020
3	Little Ringed Plover	*Charadrius dubius*	Dec 2020	31	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	Dec 2020
4	Asian Openbill	*Anastomus oscitans*	Dec 2020	32	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*	Dec 2020
5	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	Dec 2020	33	Lesser Whitethroat	*Curruca curruca*	Dec 2020
6	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*	Dec 2020	34	Large Grey Babbler	*Argya malcolmi*	Dec 2020 Mar 2021
7	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	Dec 2020	35	Asian Pied Starling	*Gracupica contra*	Dec 2020
8	Great Egret	*Ardea alba*	Dec 2020	36	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*	Dec 2020
9	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	Dec 2020	37	Indian Robin	*Saxicoloides fulicatus*	Dec 2020
10	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*	Dec 2020	38	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*	Dec 2020
11	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*	Dec 2020	39	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*	Dec 2020
12	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	Dec 2020	40	Jungle Bush Quail	*Perdicula asiatica*	Dec 2020
13	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	Dec 2020	41	Indian Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	Jan 2021
14	Grey Francolin	*Francolinus pondicerianus*	Dec 2020	42	Laughing Dove	*Streptopelia senegalensis*	Jan 2021
15	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	Dec 2020	43	Grey-headed Swamphen	*Porphyrio poliocephalus*	Jan 2021
16	Spotted Dove	*Streptopelia chinensis*	Dec 2020	44	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	Jan 2021
17	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	Dec 2020	45	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*	Jan 2021
18	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*	Dec 2020	46	Red-necked Falcon	*Falco chicquera*	Jan 2021
19	Red-naped Ibis	*Pseudibis papillosa*	Dec 2020	47	Bay-backed Shrike	*Lanius vittatus*	Jan 2021
20	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*	Dec 2020	48	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*	Jan 2021
21	Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*	Dec 2020	49	Ashy Woodswallow	*Artamus fuscus*	Jan 2021
22	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*	Dec 2020	50	Jerdon's Bushlark	*Mirafra affinis*	Jan 2021
23	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*	Dec 2020	51	Plain Prinia	*Prinia inornata*	Jan 2021
24	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	Dec 2020	52	Blyth's Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus dumetorum*	Jan 2021
25	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*	Dec 2020	53	Brahminy Starling	*Sturnia pagodarum*	Jan 2021
26	Coppersmith Barbet	*Psilopogon haemacephalus*	Dec 2020	54	Yellow-billed Babbler	*Turdoides affinis*	Jan 2021
27	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*	Dec 2020	55	Red Collared Dove	*Streptopelia tranquebarica*	Mar 2021
28	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*	Dec 2020				

Birds seen at East Yadgarpally							
Sl No	**Common Name**	**Scientific Name**	**Month**	**Sl No**	**Common Name**	**Scientific Name**	**Month**
1	Southern Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*	Jan 2021	20	Indian Golden Oriole	*Oriolus kundoo*	Jan 2021
2	Blue-faced Malkoha	*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*	Jan 2021	21	Long-tailed Shrike	*Lanius schach*	Jan 2021
3	Painted Stork	*Mycteria leucocephala*	Jan 2021	22	Blue Rock Thrush	*Monticola solitarius*	Jan 2021
4	Pied Kingfisher	*Ceryle rudis*	Jan 2021	23	Pied Bushchat	*Saxicola caprata*	Jan 2021
5	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*	Jan 2021	24	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*	Jan 2021
6	Black-headed Cuckooshrike	*Coracina melanoptera*	Jan 2021	25	Oriental Honey-buzzard	*Pernis ptilorhynchus*	Jan 2021
7	Common Iora	*Aegithina tiphia*	Jan 2021	26	Booted Eagle	*Hieraaetus pennatus*	Jan 2021
8	Ashy-crowned Sparrowlark	*Eremopterix griseus*	Jan 2021	27	Spotted Owlet	*Athene brama*	Jan 2021
9	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*	Jan 2021	28	Eurasian Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*	Jan 2021
10	Black Redstart	*Phoenicurus ochruros*	Jan 2021	29	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*	Jan 2021
11	Baya Weaver	*Ploceus philippinus*	Jan 2021	30	Green Sandpiper	*Tringa ochropus*	Jan 2021
12	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*	Jan 2021	31	Bluethroat	*Luscinia svecica*	Jan 2021
13	Paddyfield Pipit	*Anthus rufulus*	Jan 2021	32	Eurasian Kestrel	*Falco tinnunculus*	Jan 2021
14	Black-headed Bunting	*Emberiza melanocephala*	Jan 2021	33	Brown Shrike	*Lanius cristatus*	Jan 2021
15	River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*	Jan 2021	34	Large-billed Crow	*Corvus macrorhynchos*	Jan 2021
16	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*	Jan 2021	35	Siberian Stonechat	*Saxicola maurus*	Jan 2021
17	Intermediate Egret	*Ardea intermedia*	Jan 2021	36	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	Feb 2021
18	Indian Roller	*Coracias benghalensis*	Jan 2021	37	Painted Francolin	*Francolinus pictus*	July 2021
19	Coppersmith Barbet	*Psilopogon haemacephalus*	Jan 2021	38	Jacobin Cuckoo	*Clamator jacobinus*	July 2021

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LATEST GREEN LUNG

Report: Kondagorre Wilderness Park, July 31, 2021

Text: Surekha Aitabathula; Photos: Dr G Samuel Sukumar

Scaly-breasted Munia

The name Kondagorre which translates to Chowsingha or Four-horned Antelope. Kondagorre Wilderness Park has been designated as India's first Wilderness Park by the Telangana State Forest Development Corporation. This Park is structured to focus on biodiversity conservation, sustainability, and rewilding with total inclusivity. The forest is spread across 2,635 acres wherein several thousand forest species saplings have been planted.

A small portion of the total area is slated to be developed as an urban forest park with facilities such as jogging paths, nature trails, green cafes, cycling tracks and dormitories, in a phased manner. The whole park is protected by fencing.

One fine Saturday morning in July, around a dozen of us DB members set off to explore Kondagorre Wilderness Park at Lalgadi Malakpet, near the Outer Ring Road on Karimnagar Highway, with a thrill of anticipation. The first Park dwellers to greet us with their colourful presence were the butterflies.

Small Grass Yellow

Common Pierrot

Plenty of Small Grass Yellows (*Eurema brigitta*) were flitting around – never once sitting. They were like brilliant yellow dots flying all around us – left, right and centre. Spotting the Slate Flash (*Rapala manea*) in Kondagorre was the most unexpected pleasure. The Common Pierrot (*Castalius rosimon*) with its distinct black and white pattern was another sweet spotting.

Forget-me-not

Tawny Coster

Pioneer

We also saw the Six-spot Ground Beetle or Domino Beetle, another creature with six geometrically placed pure white spots on a jet black body.

Ground Skimmer (aka Chalky Percher) female

For some reason, there was very little bird activity. However, being serious bird lovers, we were happy to revisit the usual suspects for the umpteenth time, notable among them being the Grey-breasted Prinia and the Common Babbler.

Grey-breasted Prinia

Dark Grass Blue

Purple-rumped Sunbird male

The group during the walk

And thus ended a lovely Saturday afternoon with a wonderful coffee break hosted at their place by our birder pals, Usha and Satish Grama.

The full list of birds and butterflies seen is given below:

LIST OF BIRDS		
Sl No	**Common Name**	**Scientific Name**
1	Spotted Dove	*Streptopelia chinensis*
2	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*
3	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*
4	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
5	Blue Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*
6	Common Babbler	*Argya caudata*
7	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
8	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*
9	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
10	Laughing Dove	*Streptopelia senegalensis*
11	Yellow-billed Babbler	*Turdoides affinis*
12	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*
13	Grey-breasted Prinia	*Prinia hodgsonii*
14	Red-rumped Swallow	*Cecropis daurica*

LIST OF BUTTERFLIES		
Sl No	**Common Name**	**Scientific Name**
1	Pioneer	*Belenois aurota*
2	Gram Blue	*Euchrysops cnejus*
3	Slate Flash	*Rapala manea*
4	Common Jezebel	*Delias eucharis*
5	Common Mormon	*Papilio polytes*
6	Small Grass Yellow	*Eurema brigitta*
7	Tawny Coster	*Acraea terpsicore*
8	Plain Tiger	*Danaus chrysippus*
9	Common Pierrot	*Castalius rosimon*
10	Forget-me-not	*Catochrysops strabo*
11	Dark Grass Blue	*Zizeeria karsandra*

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Greater Crested Tern (*Thalasseus bergii*)

Greater Crested Tern (Pazhaverkadu, Pulicat, December 12, 2020 & March 03, 2020)

Order: Charadriiformes
Family: Laridae
Genus: *Thalasseus*
Species: *T. bergii*
Size: 46-49 cm

Description & distribution: The Greater Crested Tern, also known as the Crested Tern or the Swift Tern, is a large tern from the family, Laridae. It is also closely related to the Lesser Crested and Royal Terns, though it can easily be told apart. Like most terns, The Greater Crested Tern also has a sleek, light build and long pointed wings that aid in fast flight. The Greater Crested Tern has white underparts and forehead, while the upperparts and inner wings are dusky grey. The short legs are black, the bill is yellow – one of the features that differentiates it from the other similar terns – and the tail is deeply forked. It has a glossy black crest that is visibly shaggy at the rear, and the tertials show clear white fringes. In winter, its upperparts become an almost uniform paler grey, and the crown becomes white, merging at the rear into a peppered black crest and mask. The sexes are similar, but juvenile birds are quite distinctive – the head is patchy white, like the winter adult, and the upperparts show a strong grey, white and brown pattern. The closed wings may show dark bars.

The Greater Crested Tern is present in tropical and warm temperate coastal parts of the Old World, right from South Africa, around the Indian Ocean to Australia and the Pacific. Five sun-species are recognized: *T. b. bergii*, seen on the coasts of Namibia and South Africa; *T. b. enigma*, seen in Zambezi, Mozambique and south to parts of South Africa; *T. b. cristata* of the eastern Indian Ocean, Australia and western Pacific Ocean; *T. b. thalassina* of the western Indian Ocean, and *T. b. velox*, seen in the Red Sea, Persian Gulf and northern Indian Ocean. These differ mainly in the colour of bill and upperparts, and all of them follow different breeding cycles, with their breeding period varying depending on population and location.

Habitat & behaviour: All populations of the Greater Crested Tern disperse after breeding, sometimes travelling as much as 2000km to non-breeding grounds. When not breeding, the Greater Crested Tern roosts in medium to large-sized groups, usually on open shores or larger creeks but also, sometimes, on boats, raised salt mounds or sandbars, or coastal buildings.

Its diet consists primarily of fish, although it does sometimes take cephalopods, crustaceans and insects; it has also been known to pick up unusual vertebrate prey like agamid lizards and turtle hatchlings. It catches the fish primarily by plunge diving or dipping from the surface, usually in marine environments, and swallows the fish in mid-air. It also regularly follows fishing boats for any bycatch that may be jettisoned by the fishermen. It is a territorial and vocal species, especially while breeding, and the territorial call is a crow-like *kerrak*. Other calls include a *korr-korr-korr* uttered by jittery birds near the nest, and a hard *wep wep* uttered in flight.

Nesting: The Greater Crested Tern breeds in large, densely populated colonies on islands or coasts of the tropical or sub-tropical Old World countries, often colonially along with other seabirds. However, it is also known to use unusual nesting locations like the roofs of buildings or artificial nesting islands amid salt pans or sewage treatment plants. It is monogamous and maintains a pair bond for the year and sometimes over subsequent seasons. However, it does not show site fidelity, changing its nest site from one year to the next, and often by 200km. Breeding display includes head raising and bowing, and it may also indulge in courtship feeding. The typical nest is usually a shallow scrape on open ground amidst low shrub or on low-lying sandy, rocky or coral islands, or in coastal areas. It may be unlined, or may contain small stones or cuttlefish bones. The usual clutch consists of 1-2 eggs, which are cream in colour with blackish streaks. Chicks are precocial, and parental duties are shared by both parents.

Local name: The Greater Crested Tern is known as *'Periya kondai aala'* in Tamil, *'Chotili dariyayi dhomdi'* or *'Motili dariyayi vabagali'* in Gujarati, and *'Muhudu lihiniya'* in Malayalam.

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Cuckoo Strikes Again… At Yapral lake, Secunderabad, October 2021

Text & Photos: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao

Jacobin Cuckoo chick

On October 18, 2021, while driving to the city, I noticed three Lesser Whistling-ducks with 7-8 chicks trying to cross the Yapral-Kowkoor Road from the Cantonment wall towards the lake side. Due to heavy morning traffic, their attempts proved futile, as no one cared to even notice them patiently waiting in the bushes. I stopped a few yards ahead and tried to usher them to the other side, but they refused to take my offer and went in to the bushes and hid themselves. After waiting for a few minutes, I left them to their better judgement, hoping to see them in the lake the next day. Since then, I have been visiting the Yapral Lake hoping to see the Lesser Whistling-duck family, but without any luck.

Jacobin Cuckoo chick #1

On October 23, 2021, while scanning the lake for the Lesser Whistling-ducks, I noticed a flock of Yellow-billed Babblers feeding a Jacobin Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) chick. The Babblers were comfortable with my presence; however, the cuckoo chick was not. It quickly flew to the other bank of the lake and into the Acacia bushes. The Babbler family followed suit and continued to take care of the chick.

Yellow-billed Babbler (foster parent) with feed

The Jacobin Cuckoo sunbathed for a while before descending along the bush to scoop up some water.

Jacobin Cuckoo chick #1 drinking water from the lake

Jacobin Cuckoo chick #2

It was then that I noticed that the foster parents were busy feeding another chick in the neighbouring bush. On closer examination, and to my surprise, I noticed a second Jacobin Cuckoo chick. Thus it was clear that the same flock of Yellow-billed Babblers were tending to both the chicks.

Jacobin Cuckoo chick #2 being fed

Previously, on August 31, 2018, I had recorded a Jacobin Cuckoo visiting the nest of Yellow-billed Babblers in the Purple Butterfly tree (Bauhinia purpurea) opposite my house, and spending a few seconds at the nest. I did observe the nest for a few days following this incident and it was business as usual for the Babbler family till either a Southern Coucal or a Rufous Treepie raided the nest. The Babblers no longer came to the nest after this clean up act. A few days later, during the routine pruning of trees by the Electricity Dept, I happened to peep into the nest and had found that it was empty.

Coming back to the case of the two Jacobin Cuckoo chicks. A quick literature review suggests that while the Jacobin Cuckoo usually lays around 25 eggs per season in different nests, it usually lays only a single egg in one nest, although it does occasionally lay two. Hence, I present here a few possibilities:

1. The same female Jacobin Cuckoo laid two eggs in one go;
2. The same female Jacobin Cuckoo laid one egg each on two consecutive days;
3. This could this be the work of two different female Jacobin Cuckoos, who may have tricked the hosts independently; or
4. It is also a possibility that the Cuckoo chicks could actually be from two different nests of the same flock of Yellow-billed Babblers.

The future may unfold this mystery for us. Till then I intend to keep watching them. And I am still hopeful of finding the Lesser Whistling-duck family in the coming days!

References:

1. http://www.oiseaux-birds.com/card-jacobin-cuckoo.html
2. http://www.biodiversityexplorer.info/birds/cuculidae/clamator_jacobinus.htm

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Bird Humour

Umesh Mani

(From Vital Times, Seattle, USA, September 2021)

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